

Alfred Uihlein House
1639 North Fifth Street
Milwaukee
Milwaukee County
Wisconsin

HABS No. WIS-253

HABS
WIS,
40-MILWA,
16-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20005

ALFRED UIHLEIN HOUSE

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Location: 1639 North Fifth Street (west side of North Fifth between West Galena and West Walnut Street) Milwaukee, Milwaukee County, Wisconsin.

Present Owner: At the time of the survey in 1969 the building was owned by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Milwaukee, but it stood vacant and was demolished in 1970.

Statement of Significance: This excellent, late nineteenth-century mansion was built for an executive of the nearby Schlitz Brewing Co. and was at the time it was recorded one of the last surviving homes in the once affluent German residential area popularly known as Uihlein Hill.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: Alfred Eugene Uihlein, the mansion's first owner, left the house to his three surviving children, who donated it to the Archdiocese of Milwaukee in December, 1935. It became the property of the City of Milwaukee in 1970.
2. Date of erection: 1887 (?). Several published accounts, dating from the 1930s and later, state that the house was built in 1887, among them a Milwaukee Journal article of December 23, 1935, which quotes the Rev. Casimir Cvercko of St. Stephen's Slovak Catholic Church (then two doors north of Uihlein's house), who had discussed the residence with its original owner. The kinds of documents -- the building permit, tax records, and the like -- that could verify this date or establish an alternate one, are lost, and neither the Archdiocese nor Uihlein family members contacted have records on the structure's origins. Alfred Uihlein had built a frame house on the site c. 1875, and, as an insurance map reveals, this house was still standing in 1886. The same map also indicates that the frame dwelling had been razed and replaced by the present brick and stone one by 1892.
3. Architect: Unknown. On the basis of style and building materials, the house has been attributed to Henry C. Koch and Co., a Milwaukee architectural firm.
4. Builders and suppliers: Unknown. The stained-glass windows were from Tiffany's.

5. Original plans: None known.
6. Alterations and additions: Building permits from Uihlein's years of ownership record only one change -- construction in 1933 of a small addition for an elevator shaft, on the southwest corner of the house. Joseph G. Schier was in charge of the work, and the elevator was installed by the A. Kieckhefer Elevator Co. Later permits reflect that in 1938, when the house serving as the rectory for St. Stephen's Church, the old garage was razed and that in the past two decades, while the house was used by the Maryknoll Fathers and as the Speech Clinic of the Department of Catholic Education, new electrical outlets and light fixtures and a new heating system were installed. At an undetermined date the rear side porch, on the south wall, was removed.

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure:

1. The original owner of this house was a prominent member of an illustrious Milwaukee family. Alfred E. Uihlein (1852-1935) came to the United States from Germany in 1867; and after working for a few years in breweries at St. Louis, Missouri, and Leavenworth, Kansas, he settled in Milwaukee, where he joined the Joseph Schlitz Brewing Co. One of Milwaukee's early breweries, this company was founded in the late 1840s by August Krug, Uihlein's uncle. On Krug's death in 1856 his business manager, Joseph Schlitz, took charge of the firm; and after Schlitz died nineteen years later, Alfred Uihlein and his brothers operated the brewery. Alfred served as superintendent until 1917, when he succeeded Henry Uihlein as president. Under the Uihleins' leadership Schlitz became one of the nation's leading breweries. (In 1969 it was the second largest brewer in the country.)
2. During the late nineteenth century the area just north and west of the Schlitz Brewing Co. was one of Milwaukee's finest residential areas. The Uihlein brothers had begun building houses there in the early 1870s, and the neighborhood soon came to be known as Uihlein Hill. As time went by, second generation members of the family elected to live elsewhere, but the first generation stayed on, even after the neighborhood had changed radically. The last of them, Charles Uihlein's widow Emma, died in 1946. Of the many splendid homes that once lined North Fourth to Seventh streets, West Walnut, West Galena, and West Cherry streets, only two remained in 1969 -- this building and the former Henry Uihlein house, 437 West Galena Street, similar in style, dating from the same period, and also the property of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. The area was rezoned for light industry, and the two mansions were acquired by the city and razed in 1970.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old Views:

- a. A photograph of the exterior, seen from the southeast, was published in the Johnson Electric Service Co.'s booklet Among the Beautiful Homes of Milwaukee, Milwaukee, n. d. (c. 1892?), 17. It shows the south porch before it was removed. (See HABS photocopy.)
- b. A photo of the exterior, viewed from the northeast, appeared in Art Work of Milwaukee, Chicago, 1895, Fig. 74. (See HABS photocopy.)

2. Bibliography:

a. Primary and unpublished sources:

Building permits and other records, 1933-63, General Office, Inspector of Buildings, 1010 Municipal Building, Milwaukee.

Inspection of the house, June 25, 1968 and July 11, 1969.

Interviews with the Rev. Edmund J. Goebel, Superintendent, Catholic Schools, Milwaukee and with C. E. Dyer, Henry Uihlein Office, Milwaukee -- both in July, 1969.

Peters, Mrs. Helen Uihlein, letter to recorder, July 16, 1969.

Records of ownership, Records and Research, 509 City Hall, Milwaukee.

Schroeder, Mrs. Gertrude Elser, letter to recorder, August 3, 1969.

b. Secondary and published sources:

"Alfred Uihlein Dead; Last of Four Brothers," Milwaukee Sentinel, February 22, 1935, 1.

"Alfred Uihlein Dies at His Home Here, Aged 82," Milwaukee Journal, February 21, 1935, 1.

"Alfred Uihlein Rites are Set," Milwaukee Journal, February 22, 1935, Section 2, 1.

Art Work of Milwaukee, Chicago, 1895, Fig. 74.

"Church Is to Expand With Gift of Uihleins," Milwaukee Journal, December 23, 1935, Section 2, 1.

Davis, Richard S., "Uihlein Widow's Death Recalls Life on the Hill," Milwaukee Journal, August 21, 1946, Section 2, 1, 4.

Dictionary of Wisconsin Biography, Madison, 1960, 355.

"Heirs Deed Uihlein Mansion to Church," Milwaukee Sentinel, December 22, 1935, 1.

History of Milwaukee, Chicago and Milwaukee, 1922, 671.

Insurance Maps of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, New York, 1894, II, 134.

Insurance Maps of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, New York, 1910, III, 265.

Johnson Electric Service Co., Among the Beautiful Homes of Milwaukee, Milwaukee, n. d. (c. 1892?), 17.

Mickelsen, Gunnar, "When Milwaukee Meant 'Beer' to the Whole World," Milwaukee Sentinel, January 17, 1932, D6 and January 24, 1932, D6.

Milwaukee City Directory

Milwaukee Writers' Project, History of Milwaukee County, Milwaukee, 1947, 494-495.

Perrin, Richard W. E., Milwaukee Landmarks, Milwaukee 1968, 78, 79.

Rascher, Charles, Rascher's Insurance Atlas of the City of Milwaukee, Wis., Chicago, 1876, 92.

Rascher, Charles, Rascher's Fire Insurance Atlas of the City of Milwaukee, Wis., Chicago, 1888, I, 60.

"Uihlein Hill," Milwaukee Journal, September 22, 1946, Roto Section, 8.

"Uihlein Home Gift to Church," Milwaukee Journal, December 22, 1935, 1.

Unidentified clippings in the collection of the Milwaukee County Historical Society.

Prepared by: Mary Ellen Wietczykowski
1111 North Astor Street
Milwaukee, Wisconsin
August 5, 1969

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: This eclectic structure is typical of many of Milwaukee's mansions built in the 1880s and 1890s. The majority of these buildings are now gone. The Uihlein house was jeopardized when its entire neighborhood, once the site of homes of wealthy German families, was designated for light industry under an urban renewal program. The house remained in 1969 relatively unchanged and in fine condition.
2. Condition of fabric: Demolished. It was used before its demolition by the Department of Catholic Education as a speech clinic. At the time of demolition it was in excellent condition.

B. Description of the Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The house is a three-story building with a full basement and an attic. It is rectangular in plan with two projecting bays, a turret and a stone porch. The building measures 46 feet x 81 feet, including the porch (85 feet including the steps).
2. Foundations: Rock-faced Wauwatosa limestone
3. Wall construction: The walls are predominately Milwaukee pressed brick. The original cream color has blackened with age and soot. The front (east) of the house and the porch are of Ohio sandstone, lavishly embellished by an anonymous stonecarver. The third floor and attic dormers are finished with shingles in an imbricated pattern.
4. Structural framing: Masonry bearing walls
5. Porches: The front or entry porch is of ornately carved Ohio sandstone. It is supported by two squat Romanesque columns resting on pedestals and is crowned by a balustrade. A wooden spindle work porch and deck have been removed from the south side of the building.
6. Chimneys: There are three brick chimneys -- one for the living room fireplace, one for the back room fireplace and one for the dining room fireplace.
7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance has a large double door with stained glass transom. Each leaf

has a beveled glass light above decorative raised paneling. There probably was once an iron grill in front of these doors. The side door on the south is a simple six-panel door with transom and the rear door is similar but has a protective wooden canopy supported on scroll brackets. The side door on the north as well as the narrow window beside it are also covered by a canopy, this one supported on elongated brackets that reach down to the water table. A paneled door with large glass light provides access to the elevator from the outside.

- b. Windows: Most are double-hung wooden windows, with a single light in each sash. Several, such as the front, first-floor windows, have transoms filled with stained glass. The dining room has very fine stained-glass windows, and in the main staircase area both stained glass and beveled glass were used. A small turret window off the first landing of the main stairs has small square panels of beveled glass. The dressing room on the northeast corner of the second floor has stained-glass windows. Bay windows are located on the north and south sides of the building.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape: Steep gable with an octagonal spire above the single turret and two gabled dormers on both the north and south sides. All of the pinnacles are decorated with iron finials.
- b. Framing: Timber
- c. Covering: Black slate.

C. Description of the Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Basement: There is a coal storage room, a furnace room (old) for the coal furnace, a new furnace room, storage rooms, and a laundry room in the basement. The area under the front porch is excavated -- use unknown.
- b. First floor: A small vestibule leads through double doors into a large foyer that contains the main staircase and occupies the north front portion of the house. Directly through the foyer on the north side of the house are, from east to west, a formal dining room with a fireplace and large bay window, a china closet, a rear staircase leading down to the basement

and up to the second floor, and, at the back of the house, the kitchen. Off the foyer to the south is a parlor with an ornate fireplace and the round bay of the turret at the southeast corner of the house. Behind the parlor, from east to west on the south, is another large room with a bay window, a large back room with a corner fireplace, and, at the rear of the house, a hall leading to the elevator, a bathroom, and a pantry next to the kitchen.

- c. Second floor: Five bedrooms occupy the second floor. In the front or east portion of the house is a large bedroom or sitting room with dressing room and bath. On either side of the second floor hall that runs east/west and connects the front and rear staircases are two medium-sized bedrooms with projecting bays, the room on the north isolated by the two staircases, and the one on the south, which also has its own dressing room/bath, adjacent to the front room. At the rear of the house are two small bedrooms, probably servants quarters, separated from one another by a large bathroom. All of the bedrooms have generous closets, and the rooms on the south are connected by small closet/halls with doors at either end. There is an additional large closet, probably for linens, that opens onto the second-floor hall.
- d. Third floor: A large ballroom with adjacent cloak room occupies most of the floor and there are servants' quarters comprising two rooms at the rear.
2. Stairways: The main staircase is finished in fine wooden paneling and wainscoting and has two intermediate landings. Another stair is located between the kitchen and the dining room china cabinets. It leads from the kitchen and the northwest entrance to the basement and up to the second and third floors. The stairs to the second and third floors have oak wainscoting.
3. Flooring: The first and second floors have parquet floors of maple and beech woods, with tile in the bathrooms. The basement floor is concrete except in the laundry room where it is wood. The ballroom has a wooden tongue-and-groove floor.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Fine wooden wainscoting of selected birch and oak with a clear varnish finish is extensively used throughout the house. The main stairs are paneled to the height of the stained-glass windows on the second floor. The ceiling of the main staircase is frescoed, as are the walls of the formal dining room. Elsewhere, walls and ceilings are plastered.

Spindle-type ornamentation is used freely on the fireplace mantels and the numerous built-in cabinets of the house.

The fireplaces have ornamental glazed tiles for facings and hearths.

5. Doorways and doors: The house has elaborate wooden paneled doors with ornate oak trim. The first floor doors are eight feet in height; those connecting the parlors are higher, nine feet-four inches. The second and third floor doors are seven feet-six inches high.
6. Hardware: Brass, with cast iron in the servants' rooms.
7. Lighting: Electric, original fixtures replaced.
8. Heating: Central, forced air.

D. Site:

There are few buildings left standing in the immediate vicinity. The house sits on a large city lot and has in recent years been enclosed by a metal fence.

Prepared by John N. DeHaas, Jr.
Supervisory Architect
National Park Service
July 25, 1969

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were made during the 1969 Milwaukee Project which was sponsored by the Historic American Buildings Survey, Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, National Park Service, Department of the Interior, and the Milwaukee Landmarks Commission of the City of Milwaukee, Richard W. E. Perrin, Chairman. The project was done under the direction of James C. Massey, then chief of HABS, and the team members included architect John N. DeHaas, Jr. (Montana State University), Project Supervisor, Mary Ellen Wietczykowski--now Mary Ellen Young--(Milwaukee Landmarks Commission), Project Historian, and student architects Larry Hermesen (Iowa State University), Roger Little (Kansas University), Thomas Sanford (Washington State University), and Donna Woodrum (Virginia Polytechnic Institute). The drawings were edited by HABS architect John Burns and the data prepared for transmittal to the Library of Congress by HABS editors Carolyn R. Heath, Mary Farrell, Candace Reed and Philip Hamp. Photographs were taken by HABS staff photographer Jack Boucher.